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COX M.B.

A Missionary for Five Months



THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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COX

A Missionary for Five Months

FOR seven years, beginning in 1825, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church combed the ranks of the itinerant ministry in the United States before they found a young man capable and willing to go and preach the word of God in a land afar across the sea.

True, there was much then to be done in the United States: the Indians were in need of the Gospel message; thousands of Negroes were coming into the South and growing up without a knowledge of the Book; enterprising families were gradually pushing the frontier farther and farther to the West—and their spiritual needs had to be ministered to. But despite their fervent sermonizing no one seems to have caught the vision of the needs of other peoples and other races.

However, in 1832 a young man approached Bishop Hedding, while the latter was in Norfolk, Virginia, and said he was willing to carry on his ministry outside the North American continent. This young min-

ister was but 32 years of age. The son of a soldier who was distinguished for his gallantry in the Revolutionary War, Melville Beveridge Cox was born in Maine, and had been serving churches in that state since his twenty-first birthday. When he made known his desires to Bishop Hedding, Cox was suffering from a lung disease from which he had little chance of recovery; a little more than a year before he had lost his devoted wife and his infant child, and the shock had broken him. He was in Virginia with the hope that the climate might improve his health.

Today a man in the state of health that Melville B. Cox was in, in 1832, would not be sent by any mission body to any field of service. But Cox had decided to make the greatest use possible of the short life he felt he would have upon earth. He writes about this time in his journal: "*The episcopacy has concluded to send me to Liberia. I hail it as the most joyful appointment from them that I ever received. The prospect now is that, feeble as I am, there I may be useful while the energy of life remains, that I may cease at once to work and live. A grave in Africa will be sweet to me if He sustains me.*"

Five Months' Service in Africa

In November of the same year he left Norfolk in a sailing vessel for Liberia; on March 8, 1833, he wrote, "*Thank God, I am now in Liberia.*" Once arrived in Monrovia, the capital city, Mr. Cox gathered together the Negro settlers who had attended churches and chapels in the United States and banded them together into a church. He set about the organization of the first day school in the country, and taught a Sunday school. Seventy children were in the day school and he taught them all himself. He seemed tireless in his desire to do all that he possibly could for the establishment of the business of the mission.

And then, as he and all his friends had expected, African fever took hold of him; it shook his already wracked frame, and relapse followed relapse. Between the seasons that he was confined to his bed he continued to prosecute the work of church and school and Sunday school and to lay plans for the carrying on of what he had begun. On July 21—less than five months after his arrival in Liberia—Cox was carried to his grave. He had been granted his wish to be buried in an African grave.

Was the life of Melville B. Cox a failure? Would it not have been better had he remained in the genial

climate of Virginia during those last months? Was his life wasted in a country that had scarcely begun to know him, among people of a different race and color than his own? If the story of Melville B. Cox's life ended when his body was laid to rest within sight and sound of the Atlantic surf in Liberia, there might be some reason to answer these questions in the affirmative. But Cox's influence upon Liberia, upon her religious life, upon the civilization of her native savage tribes, only began with his death.

His Challenge Inspires

It took seven years for the bishops of the church to find Cox, the first missionary. Within a year after his death five other Methodist ministers had volunteered to follow him to Liberia—to graves beside his if need be. His challenge to America, "*Let a thousand fall before Africa be given up,*" was shouted across America and brought to millions of men and women a new realization, a *first* realization of the meaning of the Master's command, "*Go ye into all the world.*"

Melville B. Cox, by his life and his death, became the founder of Methodist missions, the inspirer of the hundreds who have followed the ship routes

from America to every port of the world with the Gospel message.

Melville B. Cox, by his life and death, has given to Liberia for all time an example of hope and courage as it faces the difficulties and struggles attendant upon maintaining a republic amid the hostilities of native tribes and greedy European colonizers on three sides.

Melville B. Cox, by his life and death, founded a Christian church in the struggling colony that afterward became the only Negro republic in the world, and the only self-governing nation on the African continent. That church has had a place of first importance in molding the life of the Republic—that church and its schools have furnished the nation presidents, vice-presidents, members of the cabinet, members of the Congress, ministers, teachers, doctors, business and industrial and agricultural leaders, and men and women in many walks of life who have given Christian character to the activities of the state.

Cox Centenary in 1933

True, Melville B. Cox actually served but five months in Africa—and most of that time was in a sick-bed. But there have been few men who have

contributed as much as he to the well-being of the nation and of its people. Already the nation—not alone the Methodist Episcopal Church in Liberia but the whole nation—is planning to celebrate with appropriate ceremonies, the one hundredth anniversary of his arrival at Monrovia. The president of the Republic and members of his executive staff will have a prominent part in the services.

Melville B. Cox a failure in his service? Liberia has never been without a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church since the first group followed in Cox's footsteps; today fifteen are ministering there, and scores have preceded them for varying periods of service. His lone voice in telling the Gospel message has been replaced not only by these fifteen, but by the voices of 44 Liberian pastors who are members of the annual conference, and by one hundred local preachers and exhorters. His Sunday school has grown into seventy-six Sunday schools with more than five thousand pupils. His little day school, in which he alone taught the seventy pupils, is now a well-organized system of 25 schools, with 72 teachers, and with an enrollment of 2,078 boys and girls. Surely the spirit of Melville B. Cox, the spirit of the pioneer missionary, lives on in Liberia!

Liberia a Christian Enterprise

The very founding of Liberia was, in its truest sense, a Christian missionary enterprise. It was founded there on the west coast of Africa by Christian men, led by President James Monroe, to provide a shelter and home and congenial surroundings for men and women who had been stolen from Africa and enslaved in the United States. Long before anyone dreamed of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, there were groups and societies formed in the United States, and one was chartered by the Congress, to take freed slaves and colonize them in Africa. Some of these slaves were freed by their owners for the purpose of colonization, some had been freed years before, some purchased their freedom. But the purpose behind the whole movement was Christian and missionary, and church people gave largely to the funds that sent 25,000 or more Negroes back to their native heath and gave them and their children a new start in life. Out of the jungle these pioneers and their children, and those native tribesmen that church and school have welded into a part of the nation's civilization, have fashioned a land that has remained free and independent for a century; have given the world a faith in the Negro's essential capacities, and have

laid sure foundations upon which future generations will be able to live in peace and prosperity.

Does it often fall to the lot of an individual to make his life count for so much in any land as Cox did in those five months of pioneering in Liberia? If his purpose was to "*be useful while the energy of life remains,*" was his fulfillment of that purpose not signally successful?

Rubber Will Reshape Liberia's Life

As Liberia begins the second century of her history there appears on the horizon a new economic and industrial situation that is bound within a comparatively few years to change the life of the nation. It has been discovered that rubber can be produced at a profit in Liberia's tropic climate. This discovery comes at a time when there is a "rubber-war" on in the world, with British producers having a monopoly of the raw material and the United States, the world's greatest user of rubber, paying the high costs. So American firms, looking around for their own sources of rubber, experimented in Liberia. For one thing there seems to be abundant labor in Liberia at a reasonable wage, and beyond the boundaries are many thousands who would be eager to enter the country for employment. Liberia,

being an independent state, is not allied to the interests that uphold the prices of British rubber.

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, an Ohio concern, has obtained a lease of large acreage of jungle land suitable for the planting of rubber trees. It is expected that about 250,000 tons of crude rubber will be produced and shipped, mostly to America, each year. All of this production and shipping will necessitate considerable development of the harbor at Monrovia and perhaps at other points; railroad building from the coast to the plantations in the interior; and many other public improvements.

A Boon and a Danger

Undoubtedly the development of this industry and of other new industries will change the course of Liberia's history and economics. The small farmer or the tribal tiller of the soil will doubtless become a laborer or an agricultural expert on the plantation; he will be certain of his daily living. There will be a degree of prosperity and modernization of industry never before known in Liberia. And there will likewise be new and serious problems facing the nation and its lawmakers.

We are happy to note that the Firestone Company is working in harmony with missionary and other

philanthropic agencies in promoting education—and education that will lift the worker above the serf of some other African settlements. The Company proposes to have its plantations in various parts of the country, to provide in each for the native peoples to live in villages that will be an improvement over their present communities, to provide a schooling for the families of the workers, and to provide industrial and agricultural education for well qualified workers who may rise to positions of importance in the conduct of these plantations. Provision is likewise being made so that individual farmers and others not wishing to work for the Company, may grow rubber trees independently and sell the crude rubber to the Company at a price fair to both.

Methodism Developing Its Schools

Missionary agencies, too, are watching this development with keen interest. The Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, co-operating with the Government and other boards and agencies, is developing a system of schools that will go far to fit Liberians for the control of the rubber industry and other industries that will undoubtedly come to the Republic as a result of this new attention to its climate and products. The “College of West

Africa," that missionary school of Methodism which grew from the foundations laid by Cox and his immediate successors, is being developed into the leading educational institution of the state. A new and enlarged college building has been erected. It is hoped that the new equipment will make it possible to greatly increase the present enrollment of 300 and to add a number of college courses that will train Liberian young men for places of leadership in this new age of the nation.

Plans are under way also for the establishment of a hostel for girls and for a "Teacher Training School," connected with the College. Another important development is the proposal to establish the "Booker T. Washington Agricultural and Industrial Institute" fitting young men for life work in those fields. The Government, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, the colonization societies and the mission boards are co-operating in this development. For years the Methodist Episcopal Church has had, at White Plains, an agricultural school and station, and a government commission has rated it the most practical in the Republic. This will probably merge into the new Institute.

The native Methodist pastors are inaugurating a movement to carry the Gospel message out beyond

their home towns and to reach the many thousands of people in the scattered tribes of the interior; thousands of these people will doubtless be leaving their tribal homes in the next few years and entering the industrial and agricultural work of the plantations. Proper education for these people is of utmost importance today.

Measures are being taken also to combat the diseases that are associated with life on the west coast of Africa, especially malaria, sleeping sickness, hook-worm, and intestinal parasites. Recently a well-trained young Methodist missionary doctor was sent to the new pioneer station, Ganta, near the French border of Liberia and he finds much to do by way of healing and health instruction. In this movement for better living conditions in Liberia, the Government, the Firestone Company, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, Harvard University, the mission agencies and the colonization societies are all uniting their efforts.

And so the work that Melville B. Cox inaugurated almost a century ago becomes of greater and greater importance as Liberia rises in the rank of the world's nations. It was well worth searching for seven years to find an inspiring missionary like Cox. It was well worth giving the last months of one's life (though most of them were spent in bed) to lay Christian

foundations for a whole nation: five months of service extending in influence even into a second century!

Serving Africa

The work of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Africa and elsewhere is supported by voluntary gifts of churches and individuals through "World Service" or direct to the Board of Foreign Missions.

The annuity plan of the Board of Foreign Missions makes it possible for a donor to secure an investment and a guaranteed income, probably above prevailing interest rates, and provides at the same time a gift to help advance the Kingdom of God. Such a gift, drawing income for the donor during his or her life, can be designated for any mission field or work of the Board of Foreign Missions. Write for full information regarding annuities, or regarding gifts to mission work through bequests in wills, to Morris W. Ehnes, treasurer, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

